

Letter from Taizé

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Sharing What We Have

Letting ourselves be penetrated by the thirst for God does not detach us from the concerns of the world around us. On the contrary, this thirst leads us to do all we can so that others may enjoy the benefits of creation and find joy in living.
(Brother Alois, Letter from China)

Christa and Samir (Switzerland) spent nine months in Cairo last year.

One of the projects of our Anglican parish was to visit foreign prisoners in an Egyptian prison, who had no relatives or friends to take care of them. We joined the team that visited them once a week. The prisoners taught one another different crafts and made, for instance, handbags and wallets with glass pearls. Our team procured the necessary material for them and sold the finished products. With the money they earned in this way, the prisoners could take care of their daily needs—toothpaste, soap, food and clothing. The team did the shopping for them and brought these purchases to them. If one of the prisoners needed something but had no money, the funds we collected could also be used for him.

The purpose of our visits was also to get to know the prisoners. They told us how things were going with them and their concerns, and we told them about our life. We were struck by how the prisoners were able to come to terms with their daily life and how much they were rooted in their faith. At the end of each visit, we stood in a circle with the prisoners, held hands, sang a song of blessing and the pastor said a prayer. It was always a very moving moment. Back in Switzerland, we are still in touch with some of the prisoners.

Scientific research, artistic expression, political, trade-union or social commitments can be a way of serving God.

Alexander (Sweden), 17 years old, is active in his church as part of a group preparing for confirmation. He is also a volunteer for Swedish search and rescue at sea.

I am working with distressed people in the nearby coast and sometimes even further out on the open sea. It's an amazing feeling helping people who are in trouble; it can be anything between sickness, damaged boats or saving the environment. A lot of the time we do practical exercises to keep in shape, and we always hope we will never have to use any of it.

This work takes a lot of your spare time and you have a responsibility for being there if something happens. I work as a volunteer with no wages but I get something better, a smile and a thank-you. Knowing that you may have just saved a life, or something that someone really loves, is perhaps the best wages you can get, and it only takes a little time out of your life.

Sorting out our desires, accepting not to have everything, leads us not to monopolize wealth for ourselves.

TJ (USA) is spending some time in Taizé. In 2005, he helped the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

I had the opportunity to spend six months working with various groups trying to help the victims of one of the worst natural disasters in our history. In that time I witnessed God's grace and charity at work in profound and unexpected ways; whole neighborhoods shared whatever they had with each other. A memorable story was of a wealthy business owner who lost everything except his truck in the storm, which he started using to shuttle people and supplies around the city. He felt he had only started to feel alive after he lost everything and began living a life of service. When we share what we have, whether our time or our resources, we recognize that the value of life doesn't rest in our possessions, but in the relationships we forge with each other and in the spark of the divine that resides in all humanity. It is in this way we bring the gospel message of Christ to life and become instruments of God.

Learning not to have everything preserves us from isolation. Material affluence is often accompanied by a turning inwards, with a loss of real communication. It would not take much for things to be different.

Ema (Portugal) traveled in India.

Learning not to have everything is perhaps the main precondition for reaching

Meeting Christ in the Least

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty? When did we see you a stranger, or needing clothes? When did we see you sick or in prison?" The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me." (Read Matthew 25:31-46)

The dramatic representations of the Renaissance, as well as the tympana of the great Romanesque churches, have strongly influenced the image we have of the Last Judgment. We see Christ as a stern judge, holding a scale to weigh the good and bad actions of human beings.

If this text incorporates the traditional idea of retribution for one's acts and the establishment of a new and more just order, it also indicates that this is not primarily a question of merit that can be measured. Both the people on Christ's right and on his left are equally surprised by what is announced to them and what they are given as their share in things. The entry into communion with Christ is primarily the result of the blessing received from the Father, and good deeds are the sign of this. The people on Christ's right give the impression they have acted almost spontaneously when confronted by the urgent appeal that needy human beings were for them.

In the Old Testament we see that God rewards kindness shown to the poor (Proverbs 19:17) and that he identifies with his people (Zechariah 2:12). But here, the identification is more universal and more complete: in "the least of his brothers and sisters," Christ the judge himself is present. Henceforth, the features of Christ can be discerned on the face of every man, woman or child who suffers. As a result, though human suffering is no less real and no less heavy to bear for each person, it is transfigured.

Alleviating the suffering of others and inheriting eternal life is the true destiny of humankind. That is the kingdom "prepared for you," says Christ to those who are on his right. The others, frozen in an attitude of refusal, are drawn towards what they had not been destined for, where everything they thought they had achieved goes up in smoke. It is by attentiveness to our brothers and sisters who are suffering that we attain our true end, the eternal life that was prepared for us "since the foundation of the world."

Who are the "least of Christ's brothers and sisters" around me?

What can I do to encounter them?

What do I discover about God by encountering those who suffer?

Saint Ambrose (circa 334-397)

Ambrose was born in Trier, a Roman metropolis which, at that time, the entire Western half of the empire depended. When his father, a high imperial official, died, young Ambrose and his family moved to Rome, where he studied and then in turn joined the administration of the Empire. In 374, he was governor in Milan when a dispute split the Christian community in two. A new bishop had to be found, an almost impossible task with tensions running so high. Desiring a peaceful solution, Ambrose went to the cathedral where the bishops were still arguing. And then voices arose to suggest that Ambrose himself, though still a catechumen, should become bishop. Elected by acclamation, Ambrose ran away! He did not feel ready for such responsibility. But after thinking about it, he came back and accepted. Once baptized and consecrated as bishop, he immediately began training for his new role.

This story shows clearly that Ambrose was a man of peace, a right man, a man of peace who inspired trust. His love of peace, for Ambrose, was more than a character trait; it was a quality to cultivate, requiring painstaking work on oneself. One day he said:

Begin the work of peace in yourself, so that once you are at peace yourself, you can bring peace to others.

Was it his experience in the political life of Milan at the time that gave Ambrose such a strong awareness of the real difficulties of life? When speaking of Christ, he never idealizes. For Ambrose, the encounter with Jesus leads to a real reversal of values. God welcomes us as a beloved child and transforms us in Christ:

Do not fear that he will not welcome you, for "God does not delight in the death of the living" (Wisdom 1:13). See, he comes to meet you: he will fall on your neck – because "the Lord lifts up those who are broken" (Psalm 145:8) – he will give you a kiss, which is a guarantee of tenderness and love. He will see that you are given a robe, a ring, shoes. You are still afraid of an affront; he restores your dignity. You dread punishment; he gives you a kiss. You fear criticism; he prepares a feast.

A second notable feature in Ambrose is his

OCTOBER

DAILY READINGS

Holy Spirit, breath of the love of Christ, you are always present; deep in our souls you set the trust of faith.

1 ^{Lk 17:11-19} **SUN** Paul writes to Timothy: God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of inward strength, of love and of self-control.

4 ^{1 Thm 1:6-18} **Mon** Adore only God; serve the Lord faithfully with all your heart, bear in mind the great things God has done.

5 ^{Lk 5:12-16} **Tue** Large crowds gathered to hear Jesus and to be healed of their sicknesses. But he often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

6 ^{Jm 4:6-12} **Wed** James writes: Give yourselves to God. Resist the tempter and he will run away from you. The nearer you go to God, the nearer God will come to you.

7 ^{1 Co 4:1-13} **Thu** St. Paul writes: When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we offer comfort in return.

8 ^{Heb 13:14-19} **Fri** Keep doing good works and sharing your resources, for these are the kinds of sacrifice that please God.

9 ^{2 Co 6:1-10} **Sat** Paul writes: We are considered as sorrowful, we who are always rejoicing; as poor, we who make many people rich; as having nothing, we who possess everything.

10 ^{Lk 17:11-19} **SUN** To the Samaritan who returned to thank Jesus for healing him, Jesus said: Rise and go. Your faith has saved you.

11 ^{Ps 42} **Mon** In the day, the Lord sends his faithful love, and even at night the song it inspires in me is a prayer to the God of my life.

12 ^{Mt 7:7-11} **Tue** Jesus said: Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.

13 ^{Jn 10:1-10} **Wed** Jesus said: I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe; they will go in and out, and will find pasture.

14 ^{2 Co 3:4-6} **Thu** God has made us able to serve a new covenant, one which is not of written letters but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

15 ^{Jr 2:13} **Fri** The Lord said of his people: They have forsaken me, the fount of living water, and have dug themselves cracked cisterns that will not hold water.

16 ^{Jn 15:1-5} **Sat** Jesus said: Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

17 ^{Ps 121} **SUN** I lift my eyes to the hills: where is my hope to come from? My help comes from the Lord, who made both heaven and earth.

18 ^{Lk 10:1-9} **Mon** St LUKE Jesus said: The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. So pray that the Lord of the harvest may send out workers into his harvest.

19 ^{Rm 12:3-8} **Tue** Just as each of us has one body with many parts, and the parts do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, who are many, form one body, and each of us belongs to all the others.

20 ^{Ps 51} **Wed** O God, you desire truth in the inward being. Create in me a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

21 ^{1 P 1:3-9} **Thu** Though you have not seen Christ Jesus, you love him. Still without seeing him you believe in him and so are already filled with a joy so glorious it cannot be described.

22 ^{2 Co 5:13-17} **Fri** Christ died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for the one who died and was raised to life for them.

23 ^{In 6:51-58} **Sat** Jesus said: Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

24 ^{Lk 18:9-14} **SUN** In a parable, Jesus said that the one who prayed saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner", went home forgiven.

25 ^{Jn 3:14-21} **Mon** Jesus said: Whoever acts according to the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they are doing is done in God.

26 ^{Mk 9:17-29} **Tue** Someone said to Jesus: I believe! Help my lack of faith.

27 ^{Lk 22:24-27} **Wed** Jesus said to his disciples: Who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely? Yet I am among you as one who serves.

28 ^{Mt 7:24-27} **Thu** Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and puts them into practice is like someone who built their house on rock.

29 ^{Heb 4:14-16} **Fri** Jesus is well able to understand our weakness. He was tempted in every way as we are, yet was without sin.

30 ^{Rv 3:17-8} **Sat** Thus says the Lord: Though you are not very strong, you have kept my word, and now I have opened before you a door that no one can close.

31 ^{Lk 19:1-10} **SUN** Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus as he passed. Jesus said to him: "Come down, Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today." And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully.

NOVEMBER

DAILY READINGS

28^{Mt 24:42-44} **SUN** ADVENT Jesus said to his disciples: Stand ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

29^{Ep 2:11-18} **Mon** In Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought close.

30^{Ps 19} **Tue** St ANDREW The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

21^{Lk 23:33-46} **SUN** The criminal crucified next to Jesus said to him, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

22^{Is 26:7-13} **Mon** Lord, you level the path of the just. As we follow the path of your judgements, we set our hope in you. Your name and your memory are all our soul desires.

23^{Heb 13:7-16} **Tue** Remember those who preached the word of God to you and take their faith as your model. Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever.

24^{Mt 7:7-14} **Wed** Jesus said: Enter by the narrow gate, for the road that leads to life is narrow.

25^{Lk 6:27-38} **Thu** Jesus said: Give, and it will be given to you. A full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.

26^{1 Th 5:4-11} **Fri** God has offered us salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that, whether we live or die, we may live united with him.

27^{In 3:1-8} **Sat** Jesus said: Unless a person is born from above, they cannot see the kingdom of God.

14^{Lk 21:5-9} **SUN** Jesus said to his disciples: You will be persecuted because of my name. But make up your mind not to worry about how to defend yourselves, for I shall give you words and wisdom.

15^{Lm 3:22-26} **Mon** God's compassion is renewed every morning; his faithfulness is great. It is good to await in silence the salvation of the Lord.

16^{Is 58:15-21} **Tue** The Lord says: I have given you my Spirit. My words that I have put in your mouth will not leave you from now on and forever.

17^{Ps 106:43-48} **Wed** Save us, Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations that we may give thanks to your holy name.

18^{1 P 2:19-25} **Thu** Peter writes: If you suffer for what is right and endure it, you have God's approval. This is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in his steps.

19^{Is 64:3-8} **Fri** O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

20^{Jn 1:1-18} **Sat** Of Christ, John writes: The light shines in the darkness, and darkness could not overpower it.

1^{Mt 21:1-12} **Mon** ALL SAINTS Jesus said: Happy are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled. Happy are the merciful, for mercy will be shown to them.

2^{Ws 3:1-9} **Tue** The souls of the just are in the hands of God and no torment can touch them.

3^{Heb 10:19-25} **Wed** Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and in fullness of faith. Let us hold to the hope we profess, without wavering, for the one who has promised is faithful.

4^{Mt 6:25-34} **Thu** In a vision, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom shall I send?" And he answered, "Here I am, send me."

5^{Dt 7:7-8} **Fri** Jesus said: Do not be anxious about your life. Your Father in heaven knows what you need. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself.

6^{1 Jn 2:24-28} **Sat** John wrote to the first Christians: Let what you heard in the beginning remain in you. Then you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

7^{Lk 20:27-38} **Sun** Jesus said: God is not a God of the dead but of the living; for him all people are alive.

8^{In 6:37-40} **Mon** Jesus said: The will of the one who sent me is that I should lose none of those he has given me, but that I should raise them up on the last day.

9^{2 Sm 22:17-20} **Tue** The Lord rescued me from enemies who were stronger than I am and set me in the open.

10^{In 14:1-12} **Wed** Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father" and that will be enough for us." Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

11^{Is 6:1-8} **Thu** In a vision, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom shall I send?" And he answered, "Here I am, send me."

12^{1 Jn 2:29-3:2} **Fri** John writes: You know that God is just. Then you must recognize that everyone who lives justly has been born of God.

13^{Lk 10:21-22} **Sat** Jesus said: I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and clever, and revealing them to little children.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

DECEMBER

DAILY READINGS

5 ^{Mt 3:4-11} **SUN** John the Baptist came as the prophet Isaiah had said: A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight." ^{Col 4:2-6}

Christ Jesus, born poor among the poor, you are God's humility and you come, and you come, not to judge, but to open a way of communion with God.

12 ^{Mt 11:2-4} **SUN** Jesus said: Go back and report what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the dead are raised to life, and good news is proclaimed to the poor.

6 ^{Heb 12:2-6} **Mon** Be persevering in your prayers and be thankful as you stay awake to pray.

7 ^{Heb 12:12-24} **Tue** Seek peace with all people. Be careful that no root of bitterness begins to grow.

8 ^{Lk 1:26-38} **Wed** The angel said to Mary: Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

9 ^{Heb 3:7-14} **Thu** Encourage each other every day, so that none of you become hardened by the deceit of sin. For we shall come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the trust we had at first.

10 ^{Ps 65} **Fri** Our faults overwhelm us, Lord, but you blot them out.

11 ^{1 S 2:1-4} **Sat** Hannah prayed in these words: My heart rejoices in the Lord and in his deliverance. There is no Holy One like the Lord, no Rock like our God.

4 ^{2 Co 4:5-18} **Sat** Paul writes: We are in difficulties on all sides, but never crushed; perplexed, but not in despair.

19 ^{Mt 1:18-24} **SUN** An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

20 ^{Dt 30:1-14} **Mon** Moses told the people: What I command you today is not too difficult for you nor beyond your reach. The Word is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put into practice.

21 ^{Is 43:18-21} **Tue** God says: Do not dwell upon the past; look, I am doing something new.

22 ^{Dt 4:29-31} **Wed** You will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul.

23 ^{Is 60:18-20} **Thu** God says to his people: No longer will violence be heard of in your land. The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, your God will be your glory.

24 ^{Lk 1:67-79} **Fri** The dawn from on high has come to visit us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

25 ^{In 1:1-18} **Sat** CHRISTMAS The Word was in the world and, though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. But to all who accepted him he gave the power to become children of God.

26 ^{Col 3:12-17} **SUN** Paul writes: May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one body.

27 ^{1 Jn 1:1-4} **Mon** St. JOHN John writes: We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

28 ^{Is 52:7-10} **Tue** The Lord has revealed his holy arm before all peoples. All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

29 ^{Mt 16:21-27} **Wed** Jesus said: Whoever tries to save their life will lose it, but whoever risks their life for my sake will find it.

30 ^{Mt 11:28-30} **Thu** Jesus said: Come to me, you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.

31 ^{1 Jn 4:12-21} **Fri** Let us love, since God loved us first. Anyone who does not love the brother or sister they see, cannot love God whom they do not see.

onship with the Scriptures. To all who approached him – and many people came to listen to talk with him – Ambrose took great care to comment on the Bible and also to deal with difficult questions. He knew how important it was to help others understand the Word of God, and how first reading could leave a listener puzzled. All the impact Ambrose had lay in this desire to grasp the meaning of the Word and to share it with the faithful. The experience that St. Augustine recounted in *Confessions* is moving in this regard. By listening to Ambrose, Augustine discovered how the Bible is just a book to read, but a source from which to live life. According to Augustine, Ambrose often repeated the words of St. Paul, “The letter kills and the Spirit gives life.” One reads not to get lost in intellectual discussions but to be brought to life. Ambrose was the one who baptized Augustine, on the eve of Easter in 387.

Another important feature of Ambrose was his persistence when the essential was at stake. Although he was a man of peace, Ambrose was not afraid to make people face their responsibilities. When the Christian emperor Theodosius, residing in Milan, suppressed a rebellion in the city of Thessaloniki by shedding the blood of many innocent people, Ambrose required him to do public penance and succeeded in this. Ambrose had a deep love for the defenseless. When he became bishop, he distributed all his possessions to the poor and offered them active support throughout his life. The *Letter from China* quotes the bishop's words:

It is not your property that you distribute to the poor; you are simply giving back to them what is theirs. For you are not one are usurping what is given to all for the use of all. The earth belongs to everybody...

For Ambrose, the Church was that community where, welcomed by Christ, all learn that they belong to each other in peace and sharing. He encouraged the use of hymns, a tradition of the Christian East, to help believers to unite in prayer. For him, the vocation of believers was this:

...to remain faithful in the quiet of the faith, as on a solid and very safe shore, in the face of a threatening flood and the storms of the world. It is this steadfastness that Christ has brought to the minds of Christians, infusing them the inner peace granted to those who have gone through trials.

Why does Jesus say: “You cannot serve both God and Mammon”?

In this saying of Jesus reported in Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13, the service of “God” is opposed to that of “Mammon”. Serving God is what Jesus did throughout his existence on earth. It is also, without a doubt, what he wishes for those who follow him, and for this they must be ready and willing. But what do the words “serving Mammon” mean?

Transliterated from Aramaic to Greek, the name refers to material goods turned into a god. By extension, it can refer to money or possessions. The expression is used very rarely in the Bible, but the idea behind it is already present in the Old Testament. Believers must choose between serving God and worshipping idols: “You shall make no gods of silver or gold alongside me” (Exodus 20:23).

By expressing this antagonism between serving God and serving money, Jesus encourages his disciples not to live with a divided heart. That requires a conversion, a radical change of heart: “You have turned to God by turning away from idols, to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). In this way we can better understand that serving money, taking it as our master, is incompatible with the act of placing our trust in God.

Of course, an altruistic use of money or property can be a way of loving our neighbor. But by personalizing earthly possessions in the figure of Mammon, Christ rejects any notion of turning money into a Master to follow or obey. Without denying that it plays a role in social relations (see especially Luke 20:21-25: “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”), he calls us to make a clear choice, because one cannot both love God fully and be attached to the goods of this world. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Material goods are given to be used, but not to be stored up [...]. The heart clings to treasure that is stored up. Possessions that are accumulated stand between me and God” (*The Cost of Discipleship*).

Serving God means loving him with our whole being, and that is principally what these words of Jesus are talking about. He explains it in this way: “No one can serve two masters: either he will hate the first and love the second, or else he will be attached to the first and despise the second” (Luke 16:13). God’s love, therefore, excludes the love of money, which is even described by St. Paul as “the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Instead, Christ’s disciples are called to be content with what they are given (see Hebrews 13:5), without worrying about tomorrow or storing up treasures here on earth. Indeed, “accepting not to have everything leads us not to monopolize wealth for ourselves” (*Letter from China*), but rather to choose simplicity and to be ready to share with others.

out to others, to dialogue with them and to live together. It is an essential condition to enable us to be open to welcome all that the people we meet, who seem to have nothing, want to share with us.

Living together and cooperating with people of other cultures can cause some tension in our lives. We feel divided between the knowledge we have about the organization and functioning of our countries of origin, and the practices of the country where we are welcomed. Sometimes we would like to implement new ideas and bring change with impatient enthusiasm while being disconnected from reality, from the people we want to help. It is important to get to know the context in which we are and it is perhaps even more important to be open to listening, and involve the people we are trying to help to develop solutions relevant to them. [...] Our desire to create better living conditions will not diminish but instead will be strengthened by the trust that people will show us by sharing their lives with us. We earn this trust through perseverance in our work and the sincere interest we have in them.

It takes little to reveal the goodness present in the human heart.

Jeni and Colin (USA) spent five months in Tanzania, sent by their Lutheran parish.

We were welcomed by a family of nine to make a household of eleven people. Though Andy and Elieshi housed us, the whole community shared themselves in different ways. Metili took us to the market; Carol and Randy taught us to wash our clothes; Irene and Naema taught us African cooking; Sam and Naomi played their games with us; Glory, Masome and Beatrice gardened with us; the professors and students of the university taught us the questions that guide the church in Tanzania as it answers the question «Who do you say that I am?» while the ministers and people of the congregations we visited pointed out places where we needed to recognize God's work and gave us new words and songs of praise to tell what we saw.

Many initiatives of sharing are within our grasp.

Sylvia (Germany) speaks of her professional experience as a social-worker.

I am confronted very often with people who are going through difficult times and who are asking to be accompanied. Nevertheless, we are all asked to help people, and not only in a professional way. Maybe our friends, a family member or even someone in our parishes or at our working places, are asking for a

listening ear, for encouragement, trust and so on. I have realized that offering to accompany someone means offering precious time to him or her. This time of closeness should help the other to find his or her own resources, without giving advice on an unequal level. [...] The most important thing for me was being confronted with my own helplessness while accompanying others, and learning to deal with this, either in my profession or in my private relationships.

Respect for others is a priceless blessing to prepare peace. The borders of the richest countries must become more open. Greater justice on earth is possible

Carolina (Chile) lives in Santiago, where a new stage of the pilgrimage of trust on earth is being prepared for next December.

Sharing what we have, being just and responsible in the way we live with others, is something we are convinced of, even though it costs us to live in this way. Every young person has in their hands the responsibility for awakening the hearts of many others, of being tireless cultivators of justice and truth in our country and in the world. We are encouraged to stand up and take part in the tireless work of proclaiming the Gospel, because it is important to defend the innocent, the oppressed and the poor.

An example of this is given by the young people who work with the Santiago campus ministry, and in many other places in our country. [...] Through the encounter with Christ they have discovered that they have to live their role responsibly, in an authentic service of others. These young people have the desire to change the world, and they sense that they have to take part in the building up of a Chile with greater justice and solidarity. They manage to combine their times of study and family with volunteer aid to children who are having trouble in school. In the summer, they take part in the medical missions, making use of their qualifications. And they join social and political organizations because they believe that Christians should be present in those areas so that the consistency of their life can show forth God's love.

The Gospel calls us to simplicity. Choosing simplicity opens our heart to sharing and to the joy that comes from God.

Andy (New Zealand) took part at Taizé in the workshop on the topic: "How can we remain alongside someone in difficulty?"

I have always found it difficult to know how to help others without making myself somehow superior to them. I love the idea

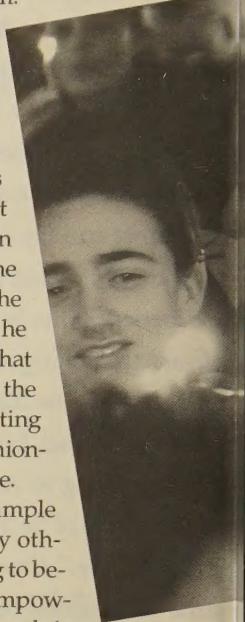
that the solution to another's difficulties always lies within the person. It is not our job, when we accompany them, to create answers for them.

But rather to be near, to help them find their own resources.

In my own life, it feels like this is also the way Christ works in me. When things are hard, he seldom changes the situation. Instead, he helps me discover that he created me with the solution already waiting within. His companionship makes me whole.

What better example when we accompany others! Instead of trying to become the hero, we empower them to find strength in themselves, keeping them our equals free to move on, not depending on us. This is the kind of gift I want to learn to give others.

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